

HABS No. CA-2314

Davis-Byrne Building
2134-2140 Dwight Way
Berkeley
Alameda County
California

HABS
CAL,
1-BERK,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

DAVIS-BYRNE BUILDING

HABS NO. CA - 2314

Location: 2134 - 2140 Dwight Way
Berkeley
Alameda County
California

Significance: The Davis-Byrne Building is a characteristic example of a once-common building type distinguished by its unusually high degree of integrity, including its unaltered storefronts. As a building type, it represents the long tradition of housing over shops as it was adopted in streetcar cities. It is an important surviving element in Dwight Way Station, a neighborhood commercial area that arose and flourished as a steam train and electric streetcar stop. This is a characteristic but rarely documented example of the housing patterns of small shopkeepers and working-class people as those patterns changed during the 20th century.

DESCRIPTION

The Davis-Byrne Building is a two-story square building (46 x 46 feet) fronting on Dwight Way at the north end of an irregular mid-block lot. The 100-foot-deep lot is wider at the street (59 feet) than at the rear (53.25 feet), providing room for a driveway along the west side of the building. The driveway was long entered under a wooden arch at the north property line. Only the brackets for that arch remain, one attached to the Davis-Byrne Building and the other to 2132 Dwight Way. The driveway leads to a rear yard area that has included stables, barns, garages and sheds along its south and east sides at different times, but is presently empty of buildings.

The building itself is a stud-frame structure with horizontal wood siding. It has a brick perimeter foundation wall with a central foundation wall perpendicular to the street under the main bearing partition. Thus, the loads are carried primarily on the side walls and the central partition, with beams spanning the distance.

It has a nearly flat roof, sloping to the rear, with an asphalt and gravel surface. There are double-hung windows (one-over-one wood sash) on all four sides. On the north-facing street facade, these are set in projecting angled bays on the second floor; the first floor consists of two plate-glass storefronts beneath a band of transom windows on either side of a vestibule with an entrance stair to the second floor. There are double doors with large glass panels into each store. One door handle survives serving the east store; this is a highly decorative bronze handle that appears to date from the period of the construction of the building, but may have been put in place at any time since then. The open stairway rises ten steps to a landing with two paneled doors; each door leads to one of the original apartments. There is an open stairway at the back of the building.

In plan, the building is a square structure which originally had two generally rectangular stores on the ground floor and two six-room residential units directly above them. The central stairway to the second floor takes a little space out of each store's rectangle. Since World War II, old partitions have been moved and new ones inserted that expand the east store into the space of the west store. In addition, a mezzanine has been built in the east store and its walls have been partly resurfaced. The west store is now L-shaped and subdivided by partitions into three spaces. Several of its doors and windows at the rear retain features characteristic of late 19th-century buildings, including deep moldings around windows with bull's-eye corner blocks, paneled doors joined with dowels, and pressed metal hardware. Attached to the rear of each store, near the sides, are old ventilated outhouses which have been used in recent years as storage rooms.

The central entrance vestibule leads through two doors up two parallel skylit stairways to the two halves of the second floor of the building. Originally completely separate apartments, these halves are now connected at the head of the stairs by a wide doorway. In plan, each half is nearly identical. While the rooms' uses have changed, the original plan has not. In the terminology appropriate to the original function as apartments, each unit had six rooms (counting

the kitchen and the bath) opening off a U-shaped corridor. At the front were two parlors, each with a bay window and connected by a wide sliding door. In the center was a bedroom with windows to the side, and a small bathroom with a tub, water closet and sink. At the rear were a connecting dining room and kitchen. The dining room had board-and-batten wainscoting, a plate rail, and a built-in china cabinet. The kitchen had a sink and drainboard, a stove, and a cabinet. Behind each kitchen was a porch, later enclosed. Each room had a decorative electric light fixture of pressed metal or enamel at the center of the ceiling. A chimney, no longer in use, runs up from the ground floor through each kitchen. Gas has long been supplied for stoves and heat. The walls are plaster over wood lath with tongue-and-groove wainscoting or baseboards. Most of these walls have been wallpapered and painted.

While the plans of these apartments were very similar, they were not exactly alike. The west apartment, occupied by the original owner and her family, and later for many years by the Richmond family, is a better unit and remains in better condition. It has oak flooring; a larger bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen; better light because it is built along the driveway; and a view of San Francisco. In contrast, the east apartment has pine flooring; a smaller and more cramped bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen -- they are built around a light well required by the building code because this side of the building abuts the adjacent property; and more constricted light and views.

Each apartment has subsequently been converted for primary use as a group of separate hotel rooms, although small apartment units existed at different times, with two surviving today. To accomplish this conversion, closets have been built into rooms where none previously existed and small kitchens have been installed in some units. In addition, rear porches behind each apartment were enclosed and occupied. A bathroom was later added to one of these.

The one public facade of the building is designed in a generally symmetrical two-part composition with glass storefronts on either side of an open stairway below and angled bay windows surmounted by an entablature above. Decorative details are derived loosely from Renaissance and post-Renaissance classical sources as interpreted on many American public and commercial buildings of the time. These details include an elongated pilaster order that frames each storefront; paneled, horizontally-proportioned wall surfaces; and an entablature with a broad frieze and a thinly bracketed cornice that stretches across and unifies the facade. These features serve to give order to the facade and a unified public presence in a manner that was popular at the time. An exception to the public character of the buildings as a whole is the more personal, private, and domestic character of the central residential entranceway with its low-pitched, bracketed canopy and board-and-batten walls. The imagery here is drawn from Victorian and Craftsman Style houses common in Berkeley.

HISTORY

Construction on the Davis-Byrne Building began in the fall of 1895 and probably continued into 1896 at a cost of \$1,363. It was partially destroyed in a fire on May 23, 1902, and was subsequently rebuilt at a cost of \$2,567. Its reconstruction was scheduled to be completed by October 1, 1902. Apart from minor repairs and maintenance work, a few interior partitions, and the construction and removal of various rear yard structures, all described below, the building has been little altered since its reconstruction in 1902. The fire, which was alleged in the newspaper to have been set to drive out Chinese businesses next door, damaged both the building at 2150 Dwight Way and this building. It is not known how extensive the fire damage was. The reconstruction cost almost twice as much as the original construction, suggesting a major effort. The presence of a charred stud next to unblemished siding visible above the ceiling of room #2 on the attached plan suggests that at least the upper wall surfaces must have been replaced. The presence of moldings characteristic of the 1880s and 1890s around windows and doors of the ground floor stores, and more modern moldings throughout the residential floor, together with the charred stud, suggests that the entire second floor may have been rebuilt.

According to contract notices dated September 10 and 23, 1895, the architect for the building was its owner and the contractor was Anderson & Greig. Because it was a common practice to list the architect as the owner when there was no architect, and because the owner was a 33-year-old female bookkeeper with no known experience in architecture and building, it seems likely that the building was designed and built by its contractors. Anderson & Greig were listed in city directories as "carpenters and contractors" in Oakland from 1895 - 1899. Their only other known building was a \$4700 dwelling in 1895 for S.H. Johnson at the corner of Dwight Way and Shattuck Avenue. After 1899, William W. Anderson and Robert Greig were listed as practicing separately. From 1918 to 1923, Greig was the Chief Building Inspector for the City of Berkeley.

The architect and contractor for the reconstruction of the building in 1902 was the partnership of Mohr and Seidel. This same team is documented as the contractor for 2128 Dwight Way, a similar building two doors to the west, also in 1902, but is not otherwise known to have been associated. George L. Mohr (1872 - 1956), was in practice as a carpenter and builder in Berkeley from 1892 to 1925. He apprenticed with Berkeley architect and contractor A.H. Broad, and was in practice on his own after 1898, except for one year when he was in the furniture business. Mohr was involved in the design and construction of numerous buildings in central Berkeley in the period 1900 - 1910. Among these are several commercial structures with apartments and hotels on upper floors, including the Bonita Apartments (1905), the University (1909) and Campanile (1905) Hotels on University Avenue, and three buildings on the south side of Dwight Way between Shattuck and Fulton: The Williams Building (1902) at 2128 Dwight Way, the Williamson Building (1905) at 2122 Dwight Way, and the Davis-Byrne Building (1902) at 2140 Dwight Way. In addition, he designed the Acheson Physicians Building (1908), a commercial building with offices on upper floors; numerous residences in Berkeley; and a cannery in Stockton.

The original owner of the building was Glennie Davis, an unmarried, 33-year-old bookkeeper who lived with her widowed mother and younger sister in the west apartment from 1895 to about 1900. The owner at the time of the 1902 fire and reconstruction was Napoleon Bonaparte Byrne (1817-1905). Byrne was a prominent figure in Berkeley for many years. He was a rancher in the area that later was developed as the northeast part of the city of Berkeley from the 1850s to 1873. From 1861 to 1868 he built a villa at 1301 Oxford Street (this house was a Berkeley City landmark, but was damaged by fires in 1984 and 1985 and subsequently demolished.) He developed islands for agriculture in the San Joaquin River delta near Stockton from 1873 until he was wiped out by floods in 1880. Afterwards he returned to Berkeley where he served as postmaster during Grover Cleveland's terms, and invested in property. He completed the reconstruction of this building when he was 85 years old. From about 1920 to 1991, the building was owned by Sam Richmond (died 1959) and his son, John (1907-1990). Sam Richmond lived in the building and operated a used furniture business here. John was an attorney who managed investment property in Berkeley. It was bought from John Richmond's estate by the City of Berkeley in 1991.

The Davis-Byrne Building was built as a two-story structure with two stores downstairs and two apartments upstairs. While physically it has undergone only minor changes since 1895, it has undergone a major change in use upstairs. In the first contract notice of September 10, 1895, the upper floor was described, ambiguously, as consisting of "living rooms." On September 23, the contract description was amended to include "dining rooms" as well. Whether this represented a change from hotel rooms to apartments is unclear. At any rate, the 1900 Federal Census shows the upstairs occupied as two apartments with one family in each. As reconstructed in 1902, the building was still a two-story structure with two stores downstairs and two apartments upstairs. The 1910 Federal Census shows the upstairs occupied as follows: the east apartment had one family with three people, one of whom operated a bicycle shop downstairs; the west apartment had two households, a family with three members and a lodger (the lodger appears to be the employer of the head of the household, in the retail cigar business), and a second family with two members. With one bathroom and one kitchen, these were very crowded conditions.

Sometime after 1912 the use of the east apartment was reorganized so that there was a small apartment at the rear with a kitchen, single rooms for rent at the front, and a single bathroom shared by all. The west apartment was occupied by Sam Richmond, who owned the building and had a used-furniture business downstairs from 1921 until about 1941. At that time he moved his family residence out of the building and converted the apartment to mixed apartment and hotel use like the east apartment. Since 1941 the entire upper floor has been occupied primarily as a hotel (meaning a building with living quarters without private kitchen facilities and with or without a private bath), with two small apartments at the rear and the two sides of the building connected by an opening at the top of the stairs. Thus, the upstairs has been occupied over the years by a variety of household types and individuals. It is now vacant.

Downstairs, the west store was occupied by a bicycle shop from 1899 to 1912, by a used-furniture business and furniture storage from 1921 to the early 1950s, by a Chinese laundry in the mid 1950s, and for storage by the owner after 1960. The east store was occupied by the Berkeley Plumbing Co. (now at 2160 Dwight Way) from 1909 to about 1920, by the Dwight

Upholstering Company from about 1920 to 1974, and by Mars, a decorating business, from 1974 to 1991. Both stores are now vacant.

In 1957 the Berkeley Building Department found numerous violations on the property. As a result of this inspection the foundation was repaired for \$2500.00, the rear stairs were rebuilt, a bathroom was added to the converted porch in the west rear apartment, all barns and sheds in the rear yard were demolished, and residential use of the back portion of the Chinese laundry was prohibited. In 1969 another inspection resulted in the removal of some illegal kitchens.

The rear yard also underwent numerous changes. The earliest documentation (1911) shows a one-and-one-half story wood stable directly behind the west side of the building at the rear property line. Adjacent to this was a one-story shed. By 1931, the stable had been converted to a garage and three more garages had been built along the east property line. By 1941, a one-story wood storage building had been built between the garages and the east side of the main building. All of these outbuildings were torn down in 1957.

The property was purchased in 1991 by the City of Berkeley for a homeless shelter. After an initial proposal to demolish the building, the property was designated as a landmark by the City of Berkeley; the initial proposal was then modified to retain the front 15 feet of the existing building. Today, prior to construction on this project, there are homeless people living outdoors in the rear yard.

Historical Context

The Davis-Byrne Building sits on land long occupied by the Ohlone Indians. The land's first known use in historic times was as a part of the Rancho de San Antonio granted to Luis Maria Peralta by the Spanish government in 1820, when the future East Bay cities were cattle grazing land. This land was apportioned to Domingo Peralta in 1846 and subdivided for sale after 1850. There were scattered small farms and ranches in this area until around the time of the planning and construction of the University of California campus in the 1860s and early 1870s. The site of this building lay across the street from the College Homestead subdivision of 1865. The first substantial non-farm development in this part of Berkeley occurred in College Homestead. With the opening of a horsecar line on Telegraph Avenue in 1872, the University in 1873, and steam trains on Shattuck Avenue to Center Street from the Oakland Pier and Emeryville in 1876, development in this area increased.

In particular, development increased at the train stops. At first there were four stops in Berkeley -- at Lorin Station, Newbury Station, Dwight Way Station, and Center Street Station, with Berryman Station added in 1878. Dwight Way and Center Street were the busiest of the early stations, and had the most commercial development around them.

The two blocks bound by Shattuck Avenue, Dwight Way, and Fulton and Parker Streets, including the site of the Davis-Byrne Building on the northernmost of these two blocks, were subdivided into parcels in 1877 as the Steele Tract. Each of these blocks had 21 lots, five of which faced west on Shattuck Avenue for commercial development, and eight of which faced each side street for residential development. From the beginning, however, this block developed

with a mix of residential and commercial development on its side streets. By 1890, there were four city dwellings on the residential lots and nearly continuous commercial development along Shattuck Avenue and Dwight Way, much of it owned by John K. Stewart since 1885 or earlier.

The Davis-Byrne site, then on what was called lot 38 and a portion of lot 37, was part of this single large holding. The first development on the site occurred about 1890 with a building for a carpenter adjacent to another for a meat dealer, and a stable and a shed at the rear.

In 1891, a new streetcar began running on Shattuck Avenue known as the #4. By 1894, there was increased residential and commercial development on the block. The carpenter was gone from the Davis-Byrne site and the meat dealer expanded his building and added another stable. When the Davis-Byrne Building was first built in 1895, the neighborhood was beginning to be rebuilt with buildings whose character was defined by a response to streetcars and rail transportation. The building and others that followed replaced the first generation of Dwight Way Station buildings. The model for this earlier development was that of a small farm-supply town where goods brought by rail were delivered to outlying residents by horsedrawn wagon. The Davis-Byrne Building belongs to a different development model, that of the streetcar city, where higher land values result in greater density of development, where the highest density is near rail stops, where commuters travel long distances to work, and where a variety of goods and services are required and can be supported. By 1905, when the Davis-Byrne Building had been rebuilt, and the Williams and Williamson buildings closer to Shattuck had been completed, this block of Dwight was transformed from a cluster of pre-rail buildings to a characteristic example of streetcar urbanization typical of its period.

Rail and streetcar service continued to improve with the beginning of the Key System electric trains on Shattuck Avenue in 1903, the Key Line streetcars on Dwight Way ca. 1908-1910, the Ellsworth line two blocks east in 1911, and the conversion of the steam trains to electric in 1911. In this period, the area around the Center Street Station developed most intensively, creating the downtown Berkeley we recognize today. Dwight Way Station continued to function and develop as a neighborhood streetcar commercial district. In this period, there was good rail transit service to many parts of the East Bay and San Francisco, including commercial and factory districts.

The area began to change with the decline of rail and streetcar service. In 1933, the Ellsworth line and the F train on Shattuck Avenue stopped running; in 1941, the Southern Pacific electric train service ceased and the F train of the Key System was revived; and, in 1948, the Shattuck Avenue Streetcar #4 was discontinued. This decline was largely due to the rising use of automobiles and the opening of the Bay Bridge in 1937.

By 1950, the Sanborn map shows increasing industrial and commercial development, mostly automobile-related, on Dwight Way east of Shattuck Avenue, and the demolition of most of the Shattuck Avenue buildings on the block for a used car lot. The physical character of the block has changed little since that time.

As a building, the Davis-Byrne Building belongs to the tradition of streetcar-related development, as discussed above. In that context it is typical of many buildings throughout the

Bay Area and the United States. In another context, it belongs to the tradition of urban buildings with shops below and residential space above. This is a long tradition that dates back at least to Roman times and ended in the United States around the time of World War II. As late as the early 19th century, most urban buildings were of a related type -- these were two to four story buildings with a shop below, the shopkeeper and his family above, and apprentices and other helpers either with the family or on upper floors. The industrial revolution and the huge growth of cities in the 19th century were accompanied by a segregation of functions. Special districts began to be more specialized in use. Shopkeepers began living in separate residential areas and commuting to work. These mixed work-and-living buildings began to change and eventually to die out. The Davis-Byrne Building, built toward the end of this long tradition, was a variation on the type. It was two units instead of one, so it was both in that tradition and, simultaneously, a real-estate development. Its work and living spaces had entirely separate entrances and rental arrangements -- there was no necessary connection between the shop and the apartment above. In fact, Glennie Davis appears to have built the building for the income it would provide. Likewise, its second owner held it for its income. But several early residents did also operate shops downstairs, as did the owner Sam Richmond from 1921 to the mid-1950s.

The social history of the Davis-Byrne Building is related to its character as an example of a building type. The residential quarters have been occupied as apartments by single families, by families with lodgers and, as shown in the 1910 census, by more than one household (including lodgers). At different points in each apartment, the rooms began to be occupied as hotel rooms by separate individuals who shared the bathroom. These people sometimes rigged up illegal kitchens, but presumably often ate elsewhere. These ambiguous and makeshift arrangements are far more common than is generally recognized. An important function of the documentation of buildings like this is to call attention to the social history of buildings and cities.

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Lin, Gene, tenant. Telephone interview with Woodruff C. Minor, October 8, 1991.

Richmond, Arthur, son of Sam Richmond. Telephone interview with Woodruff C. Minor, October 10, 1991.

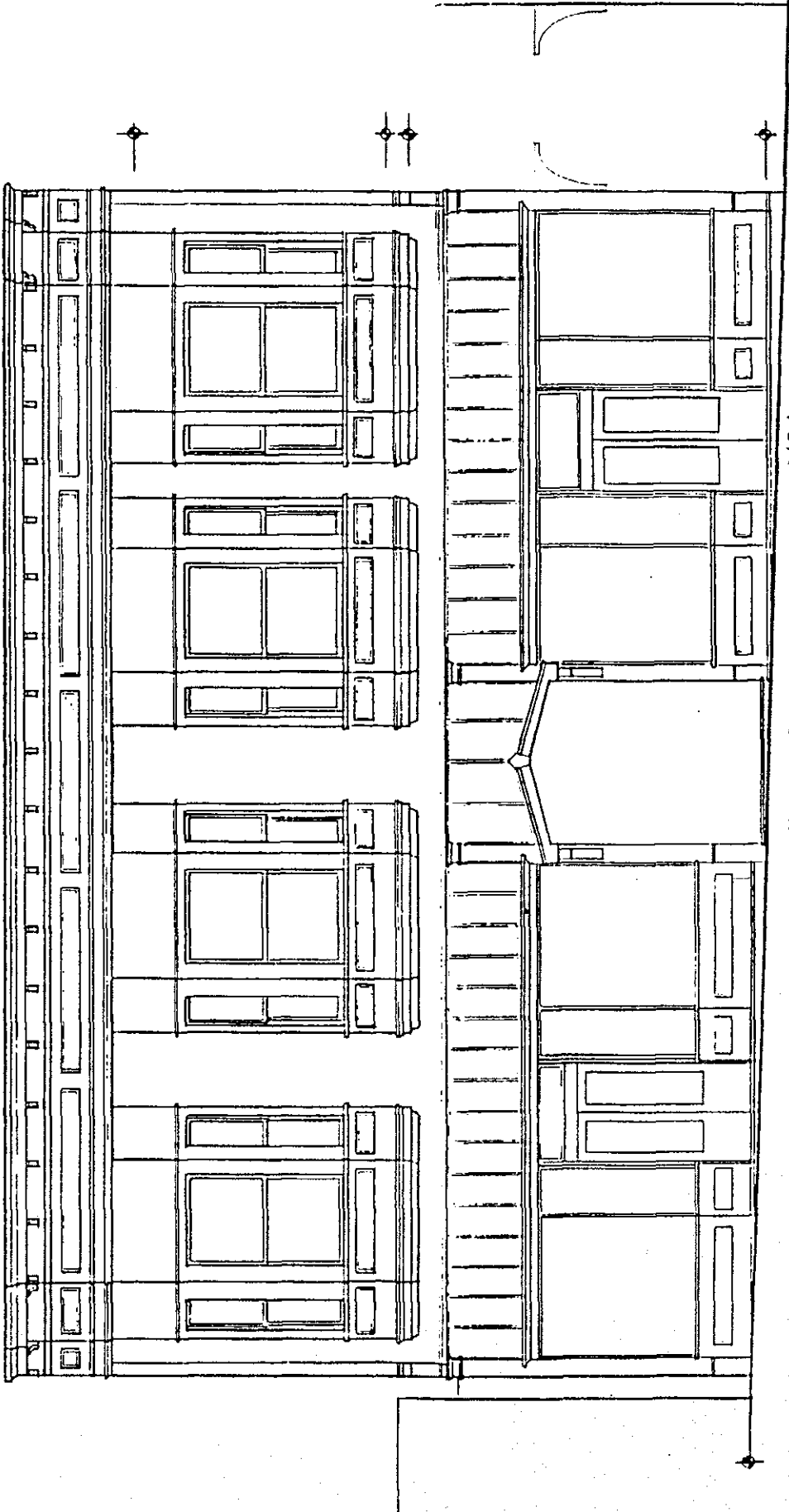
Waen, Phil, nephew of John Richmond. Telephone interview with Woodruff C. Minor, October 8, 1991.

Walsh, Dan, tenant. Interview with Woodruff C. Minor, September 26, 1991.

HISTORIAN

Architectural Data Form prepared by Michael R. Corbett and Woodruff C. Minor, sketch plans prepared by Hirschen Trumbo & Associates, photographs by Mesa Technical, all of Berkeley, California. This material was prepared for the City of Berkeley to mitigate the City's development of a homeless shelter on this site and partial demolition of this building. Documentation prepared September and October 1991, revisions November 1991. Much of the research for this report was carried out at the Bancroft Library of the University of California, the Berkeley Historical Society, and the library of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA). Anthony Bruce of BAHA commented on a draft of the report.

NORTH ELEVATION



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2134

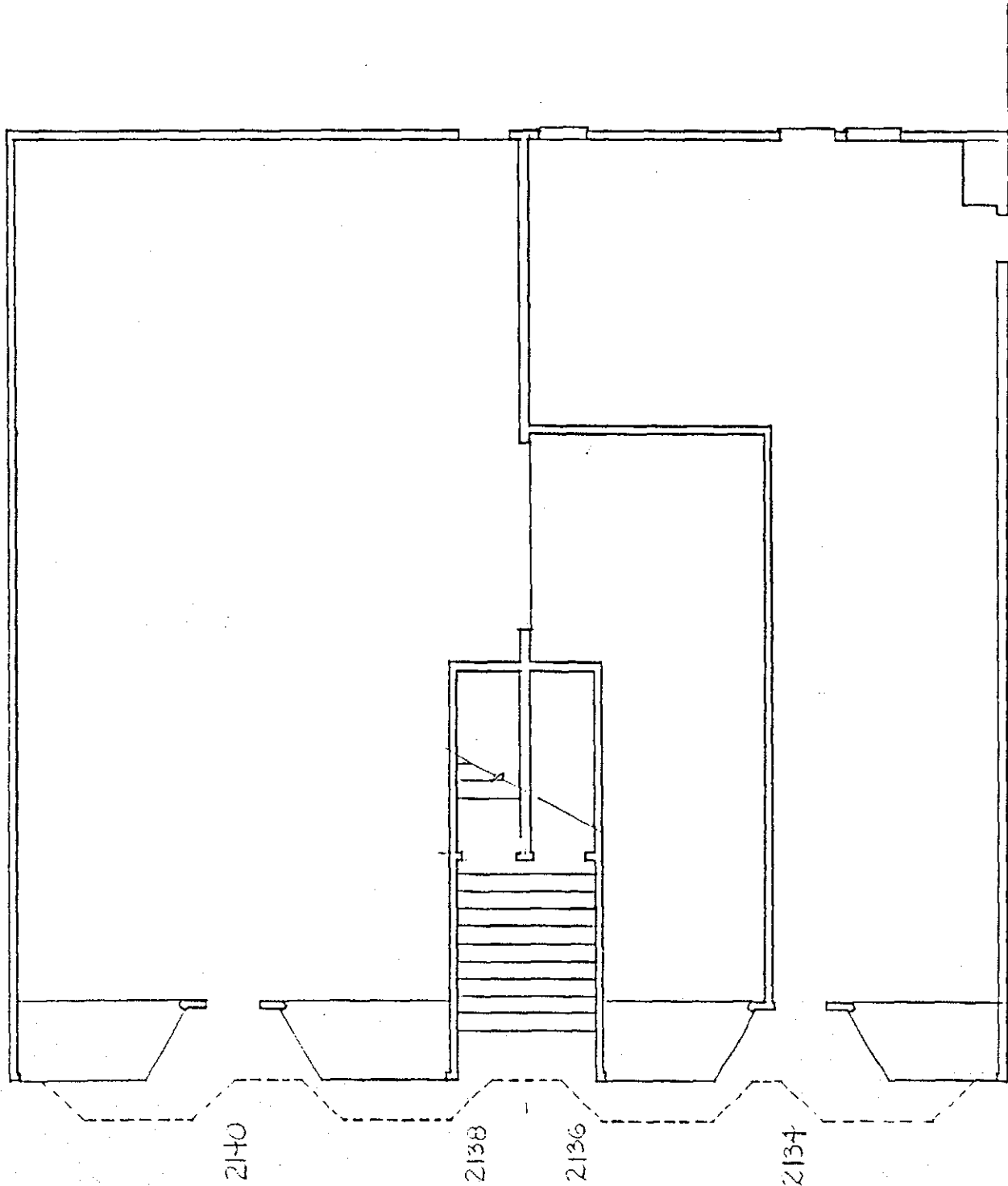
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2138

2140

2134-2140 DWIGHT WAY

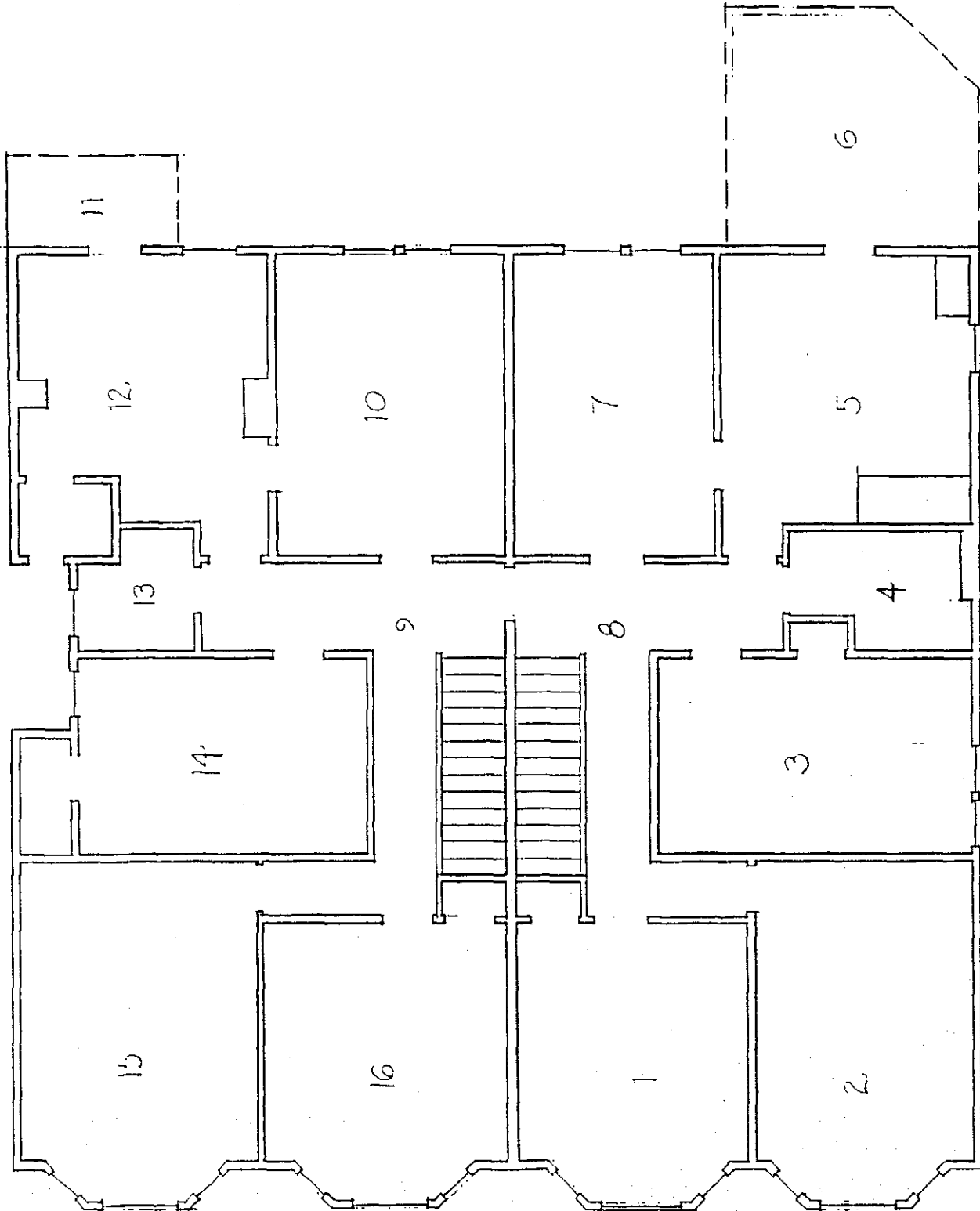
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



HIRSHEN
TRUMBO
& ASSOCIATES
ARCHITECTS

NORTH

SECOND FLOOR PLAN



HIRSHEN
TRUMBO
& ASSOCIATES
ARCHITECTS
2071 MEMORY STREET
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
94704-1122

EXISTING 2ND FLOOR
1/4" = 1' - 0"

← NORTH

ANNOTATED KEY TO SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Every room is numbered. Room numbers 1 through 8 are all part of the original apartment on the west side; room numbers 9 through 16 are part of the original apartment on the east side.

West Side (2136)

1. Formerly parlor, now Room No. 5; sliding door to adjacent parlor now blocked up.
2. Formerly parlor, now Room No. 6; closet built in ca. 1940s.
3. Formerly bedroom, now Room No. 4.
4. Bathroom; original water closet and clawfoot tub, replacement sink ca. 1930s.
5. Kitchen, Apartment No. 1; original diamond-pane cabinet; Bluebonnet stove, tiled sink, cabinet ca. 1930s.
6. Enclosed porch; Room No. 2 prior to 1971? Bath with toilet, sink, and shower added 1971 and linked to kitchen in Apartment No. 1.
7. Formerly Dining Room, now Room No. 3; built-in cabinet converted to closet.
8. Corridor and stairway.

East Side (2138)

9. Corridor and stairway.
10. Formerly Dining Room, now Room No. 2; closet added.
11. Enclosed porch; now storage.
12. Kitchen, was Room No. 1 until 1971; original sink and drain board, old 3-burner Holbrook Stove.
13. Bathroom; original clawfoot tub and enameled iron sink, recent replacement toilet.
14. Formerly bedroom, now Room No. 3; closet added, O'Keefe & Merrit Heater ca. 1938-1952; modern sink and "Spark" brand stove in alcove.
15. Formerly parlor, now Room No. 5; divided by partition and door into kitchen and bedroom.
16. Formerly parlor, now Room No. 4; sliding door to adjacent parlor now blocked up; cast-iron heater on south wall in design of a classical temple.